

The Easter Message

Key Verse:

“Like cold water to a weary soul, so is good news from a distant land.”

Proverbs 25:25

Extra: Compare the way people observe Easter today, with God’s way.

Level 5 lesson 9

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:1-20

Further Reading: Luke 23, 24

These days, messages take many forms: like telephone calls, emails, faxes, text messages, letters, spoken messages, and even webcams, just to name a few! Today though, we want to consider perhaps the most important message ever written on paper. Yes, it’s the ‘Gospel’ message, the message of Easter. Read it now in 1 Corinthians 15:1-20 and then we’ll look at it from four different angles.

ITS NATURE: In verse 1 we find that this “Gospel” is “good news.” It tells us that God in His great love has provided, at infinite cost to Himself, free salvation for a world of lost sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). You would think everyone would want to hear such a message, wouldn’t you? Why then, is it so unpopular? Well, God’s Word clearly states that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Now that is BAD news! But many people refuse to accept this; they are too self-righteous. Our Key Verse in Proverbs speaks of ‘cold water to a thirsty man’ (KJV) but it is only when we realise our sin, and acknowledge our ‘thirst’ for forgiveness that we can accept and truly appreciate this Good News.

ITS SUBJECT: This message is about a living, glorious Person - Jesus Christ, the Son of God (v3) - not about the Church, or anything else. There really could be no greater subject! Of course, the greater the subject, the greater the message, so the Easter message is the greatest ever heard. It concerns the greatest Person in the universe, coming to reveal God’s greatest love, and provide His greatest solution to mankind’s greatest need! Now that is a GREAT message!

ITS FACTS: Christ died for our sins (v3), He was buried (v4), and He rose again (v4). Firstly, notice our Lord’s death was “for OUR sins,” even though He was totally sinless and holy. His death was different from any other, because He was not subject to death as we are. He said Himself that, “No one takes my life from me. I lay it down of myself. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again” (John 10:17-18)! He demonstrated this to be true on the cross, when He simply commended His spirit into His Father’s hand and died, long before the two thieves crucified with him (Luke 23:46-47).

Since Jesus was perfect and had never sinned, He was the Only One who could possibly die for our sins. We will never fully understand the suffering that our Saviour endured on the Cross, as God brought down His righteous wrath on His innocent Son for the sin and depravity of the whole world.

After He died, Jesus was buried in the garden tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, where He lay for three days, securely guarded by a Roman guard and sealed in by a big tombstone. That is, until He, the ‘Lord of Life,’ rose triumphant from the grave while the stone was still there. He is forever the mighty victor over death, sin, and Satan! If He is truly your Saviour, you too have the victory over these three enemies (1 Corinthians 15:57).

ITS EVIDENCE: There is abundant evidence to prove our Lord rose from the dead. We have the record of many eye-witnesses who saw and spoke with Him after His resurrection; including Peter, the twelve apostles together, a crowd of around 500 people, James, and then all the apostles again. There were others too, as mentioned in the four Gospel accounts. Finally, He appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus, through which Saul was converted and became the greatest preacher of Christ this world has ever seen.

Other evidence is the “empty tomb” and the total absence of any body (an angel removed the big stone after Jesus had risen to show the empty grave). Then there was the descent of the Holy Spirit, the performance of many miracles in Christ’s name by the apostles, and both the existence of the Christian church and its triumph over all opposition despite intense persecution, even to this day. Truly we can say with Paul, “But now Christ has indeed risen from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (i.e. died) (v20)!

OUR RESPONSIBILITY: Seeing this is the case, the Easter message, the ‘Gospel of Jesus Christ’, presents us all with an important responsibility - either to believe the message and receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our own Saviour and Lord, or to ignore and reject it. Romans 10:9 reads, “If you confess with your mouth ‘Jesus is Lord’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” Can you honestly say you have done this? Do write to us if you want to receive Jesus Christ as Saviour, but still have questions and need help with this. It is the most important decision of your life!!!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What does the “Gospel” or the Good News tell us?	.....
2. Why is the Easter message the greatest ever heard?	.....
3. Write out three great facts concerning the Gospel.	.....
4. State two appearances of the Lord Jesus Christ as evidence of His resurrection.	.....
5. What is our responsibility towards the Easter message?	.....

My Name is Age

Building a City

Key Verse:
“I, (John) saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem coming down out of Heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.”

Revelation 21:2

Extra: Compare man's cities with God's future city. (Revelation 21)

Level 5 lesson 10

Read Genesis 11

Further Reading: Revelation 21

GREAT MIGRATION: In this lesson we resume our studies in Genesis 11, where we find everyone spoke just one language. After leaving the Ark, Noah's family multiplied greatly. Slowly people began leaving the highlands near Mt Ararat (where the Ark had landed) and settled in a great plain in Shinar.

There they decided to “make bricks, and bake them thoroughly” with the clear intention to “build a city and a tower that reaches the heavens.” Why did they want to do this? It seems their objective was to “make a name for themselves” and to “keep themselves from being scattered over the face of the earth.” So using their kiln-dried bricks for stone, and slime for mortar, they built their city and tower. It is interesting to compare this city and the ‘City of God’ spoken of in Revelation 21.

GREAT WICKEDNESS: We've seen how the people's intention in all this was “to keep themselves from being scattered over all the earth.” In Genesis 1:28 we read an interesting statement in relation to this: God said to Adam and Eve, “be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.” Similarly, in Genesis 9:1 God told Noah and his sons, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.” So what these people planned here was actually in direct disobedience to God's clear instruction. They were determined to stay in one place and become great!

Look what Genesis 4:17 records about Cain, that rebellious and wicked son of Adam & Eve; “...and Cain built a city...” It seems man's cities are always centres of sin and wickedness - and the bigger the city, the greater the wickedness! Don't complain if you happen to live in an isolated place, because many in the cities would cheerfully trade places with you, but can't! In a large city, the temptations are great and subtle, and apart from the grace of God, many people are engulfed and carried away by the tide of sin. Why did they want to build such a high tower? It was to ‘make a name for themselves’ - in much the same way as other cities have built skyscrapers. However, it may also have had a more sinister purpose, such as the study and worship of the stars.

Whatever their reason, it did not meet with God's approval, and that is perhaps the most important point to learn from this whole episode. When God has given such clear instructions, we should obey, or risk His punishment. We should make it a definite goal in life to seek His will in all we do; to crave His blessing on all our endeavours. This is true for all ages, but especially applicable for those who are choosing careers or perhaps marriage partners. Will this job prevent me from enjoying Christian fellowship? In my desire to live a godly, obedient life, will this person be a help or a hindrance? Does he or she encourage me in my faith, or draw me away? These are important questions we need to face up to as we make our choices in life. Always remember, God has promised, “Those who honour Me, I will honour!”

GOD INTERVENES: God intervened in a very simple way to deal with the people's foolish disobedience. He made them suddenly speak a whole lot of different languages. Of course, it caused instant confusion and such misunderstanding that all construction stopped and the whole project came to a grinding halt! God's judgement here at Babel is the origin of all the different languages spoken in the world today. And don't fail to note what is recorded in verse 9, “From there, the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.” God is sovereign and all-powerful and will accomplish His purposes with or without man's compliance, but how much better to know His divine blessing on our activities! Today, some scientists are probing into the fields of ‘genetic engineering’ without any fear or recognition of God and the sanctity of human life. One wonders sometimes if man's foolishness in this area will one day unleash God's divine displeasure upon the human race also.

Note in Acts 2, that when God wanted His gospel to reach the nations quickly He empowered His servants to speak a variety of languages so that the different nationalities gathered at Jerusalem might hear the wonderful words of God in their own tongue. Also, in Revelation 7:9-12 we see the languages of men are once again united, where redeemed humans give praise and glory to God and the Lamb, our Lord Jesus Christ.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why did the people of Babel want to build a city and tower?	.....
2. What is wrong with man's cities?	.....
3. What should we make our definite goal in life?	.....
4. How did God stop the plans of the people?	.....
5. When will all human languages be united again?	.....

The Call of Abram

Read Genesis 12

Further Reading: Psalm 105:1-15

Key Verse:

“By faith, Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed.”

Hebrews 11:8

Extra: Find some examples in the Bible to show what God thinks of lies.

Level 5 lesson 11

The call of Abram (later called Abraham) was a major event in God’s dealings with the human race. Some years earlier, God called Abram to leave his home and country, and go into an unknown land which He said, “I will show you.” So along with his father Terah, his wife Sarai and nephew Lot, he left the prosperous (but idolatrous) city of Ur of the Chaldees, (which was situated about 120 miles from the head of the Persian Gulf) and journeyed hundreds of miles north-west to Haran in Assyria. However, upon reaching Haran the journey paused and the whole family resettled there. Once Terah died, Abram again recalled God’s clear call and promise to him.

GREAT PROMISE: This was a great promise of tremendous importance both to himself and to all of us.

God promised seven things when He said:

- (1) I will make you a great nation
- (2) I will bless you
- (3) I will make your name great
- (4) And you shall be a blessing
- (5) I will bless them that bless you
- (6) And curse them that curse you
- (7) And in you shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Notice, particularly, that God promises blessing to Abram so that he might be a blessing to others, and that the whole of the human family should be blessed through him. This, of course, you will probably know, has had a partial fulfilment through the provision of Jesus as our Saviour, and will reach its complete fulfilment when He (the true seed of Abraham) reigns over the earth in a future day.

So Abram obeyed the Lord. Believing God’s promise, he “took Sarai his wife, and his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan.” Arriving there, they found it possessed by the Canaanites, but at a place called Shechem, the Lord again appeared to Abram, and said, “I will give this land to your offspring.”

Many of the current problems in the Middle East are over this issue, and have arisen due to Abram fathering a son, Ishmael, while waiting for the son God had promised him and Sarai (See Genesis 16 and also Paul’s discussion of this in relation to Christians today, in Galatians 4:21-31). God’s promise though, concerned the children of promise, those who were descendants of the ‘son of promise,’ Isaac.

In response to this, Abram built altars, first at Shechem and again later on when he moved further south and pitched his tent between Bethel and Ai. There he “called on the name of the Lord” and honoured and worshipped the One, True God right in the sight of the idolatrous heathen peoples around him.

GRACIOUS GOD: Without a fixed home at this point, Abram moved on southwards through Canaan, and when a drought arose he left Canaan altogether and went to Egypt. Now, a drought is a serious thing, especially for a farmer such as Abram with many flocks and herds, but this was a wrong step! Remember earlier Abram had been called to “go to a land I will show you.” Back then he had left Ur, but stopped in Haran. Now God had just told him, “This is the land I will give you,” but Abram kept going! We can be encouraged can’t we, that even such ‘giants’ of faith as Abram, were human like us and made mistakes, too. Yet our gracious God is still able to use frail and weak people like us to accomplish His will.

Now when Abram got near the Egyptian border, a sudden fear gripped him. He knew that his own life would be in danger amongst the immoral Egyptians, who would kill him to get possession of his beautiful wife, Sarai. So he persuaded Sarai to tell everyone that she was his sister. This was only a half-truth at best; Sarai was Abram’s half-sister, but to all intents and purposes this was a blatant lie. Again, Abram failed to completely trust God for protection. However, God graciously over-ruled in the whole affair and protected Sarai and Abram from the consequences of their foolish behaviour.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. From where and to where did God call Abram?	.....
2. Write out 3 points from God’s promise to Abram that are most important to you.	.....
3. What was the first thing that Abram did in the land?	.....
4. In what ways did Abram show a lack of faith in God?	.....
5. How did he try to protect himself from the Egyptians?	.....

Abram and Lot

Read Genesis 13

Further Reading: Colossians 3:12-14

Key Verse:

“For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.”

James 3:16

Extra: It is sometimes said that Israel's existence is proof that God is Sovereign. How is this proof?

Level 5 lesson 12

As far as earthly prosperity is concerned, Abram's journey into Egypt was certainly profitable. When Abram and Lot started the return journey to the south of Canaan, Abram was very rich in cattle, silver, and gold. But he was certainly no blessing to the Egyptians, as his scheme about his wife had only brought plagues from the Lord on the immoral Egyptian king and his household.

However, it also seems Abram's spiritual walk with the Lord did not go so well either. We read nothing in Scripture of any altar or worship while he and his family were in Egypt. However, to his credit, when Abram got back into the land he returned to the place where his altar had been previously, between Bethel and Ai. Here once again Abram called on the name of the Lord and worshipped Him as the true follower and servant he was.

RECONCILIATION: Sadly, not long after they were settled in the land, trouble broke out between Lot and Abram's herdsman. Their flocks and herds had grown too many for the land and water supply to support. It seems that fights had broken out concerning who could graze where etc. Things came to a head one day and Abram realised he must deal with this important family matter. Their ungodly neighbours were also observing all that was going on, and this sort of behaviour was a disgrace to the name of God.

So Abram determined to settle the matter, not by his superior force or strength, but by giving his younger nephew the choice of the land that was before them. Note his gracious proposal: "Let's not have any quarrelling between you and me ... we are brothers." Abram in effect goes on to say, 'For the Lord's honour and for the sake of peace we must separate. If you choose the left-hand country then I will go to the right, or vice-versa.' And so Abram in this godly, gracious way settled the dispute.

Lot, having been given a free choice, greedily claims all the best land, well-watered and with the best pasture, leaving his uncle with famine-stricken land of inferior quality. They then separated. Lot, no doubt congratulating himself on his shrewd choice, went to the east while Abram went west. Abram on the other hand was satisfied to have the dispute settled and the Lord's name saved from dishonour. It seems his faith had grown, and now he willingly put his life and fortunes wholly in God's hands for Him to provide and protect. We will see later that Lot lived long enough to regret his meanness and selfish choice.

REWARD: Abram soon realised the Lord's approval for his generosity. We read that after the separation took place, the Lord invited Abram to lift up his eyes from the high country where he was standing, and look as far as he could see: north, south, east and west. And in the clear atmosphere of that country great distances could be seen! As far as the eye could see, the Lord says, "All the land you see, I will give to you and your offspring forever" (v15). The land that Lot had chosen was soon going to be devastated and ruined in the destruction of the wicked cities Sodom and Gomorrah, to which Lot had gone, while Abram's possessions would escape. So Abram, who left the choice to God, got the "better deal" after all!

Further, the Lord promised Abram innumerable descendants: "I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted." Then the Lord gave Abram a parting instruction. "Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you." So the land of Palestine belongs to Abram and his descendants and they will surely possess it forever. It was no accident that the State of Israel was reborn in 1948, and note how God has protected them for nearly 2000 years since the Romans sacked Jerusalem in AD70.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What did Abram do first when he got back to the land?	.....
2. What made the strife between Lot's men and Abram's men so serious?	.....
3. How did Abram propose to settle the strife?	.....
4. What was going to happen to the land that Lot chose?
5. How did Abram get the "better deal" in this dividing of the land?

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